

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present the results of the analyses undertaken to evaluate the potential drawing power of conceptually defined transit service alternatives between Bangor and Trenton, Maine.

This Final Report for the *Bangor to Trenton Transportation Alternatives Study, Phase 1* is organized in the following sections:

1. **Introduction:** states the necessity for the study and provides a description of the study area.
2. **Discussion of Alternatives:** presents the alternatives that were developed for testing potential demand and their key operating components.
3. **Travel Market Assessment:** identifies significant resident and visitor travel market characteristics in the corridor and assesses the potential demand for improved transportation services for each market.
4. **Demand Estimation Methodology and Ridership Forecasts by Alternative:** describes the process by which the demand estimation model and forecasts were developed and presents the results for each of the alternatives.
5. **Conclusions and Next Steps:** summarizes the efforts conducted in Phase 1 and discusses the decisions that need to be made to determine if the concepts identified in this report should be advanced for further study.

1.2 Need for the Study

Millions of people travel to Maine each year to enjoy the attractions of Mount Desert Island, including Acadia National Park and Bar Harbor. However, traffic congestion, parking shortages, and inconvenient airport connections can undermine the attractiveness of these destinations.

The Maine Department of Transportation undertook the *Bangor to Trenton Transportation Alternatives Study, Phase 1* to evaluate alternatives to automobile travel between Bangor and Trenton, the corridor that leads to Mount Desert Island and also to assess whether any rail service (freight or passenger) should be activated in this corridor. In 1987, the State acquired a rail right-of-way called the Calais Branch. A piece of this rail line parallels the primary access route to Mount Desert Island for 26 miles between Brewer and Ellsworth. In 1998, the State evaluated the potential for freight service on the complete Calais Branch and determined that the revenue collected from its use would not be enough to cover operating costs or capital improvements on the line. However, if a passenger rail service could be implemented for a portion or all of the line then perhaps the added passenger revenues combined with potential freight revenues would make an investment in the line worthwhile.

The purpose of the first phase of the study is to estimate the demand for several potential alternatives. If the Maine Department of Transportation believes that demand is promising, then a second phase will be undertaken to define the feasibility and financing of a preferred alternative and to refine the operating plan and ridership forecasts.

1.3 Study Area and Planning Context

The study area includes the Downeast Acadia region of the State of Maine. The endpoints are defined as Bangor and Trenton; however, Mount Desert Island, located east of Trenton, is the perceived destination because of its tourist attractions. (See Figure 1: Study Area Map)

The Bangor to Mount Desert Island travel corridor is 50 miles in length. This corridor includes interstate highways, active freight rail right-of-way between Bangor and Brewer, inactive rail right-of-way between Brewer and Ellsworth, and the Penobscot River, a navigable waterway.

Interstate highways and state roads are the primary travel option in the corridor. A trip from Bangor to Mount Desert Island is made via Interstates 95 and 395 from Bangor to Brewer, Route 1A from Brewer to Ellsworth, and Route 3 from Ellsworth to Mount Desert Island. During the peak tourist season this highway route is heavily congested, particularly between Ellsworth and Mount Desert Island.

The study area includes eleven cities and towns: Bangor, Brewer, Holden, Dedham, Ellsworth, Lamoine, Trenton on the mainland and Bar Harbor, Mount Desert, Southwest Harbor and Tremont on Mount Desert Island. Key activity centers in the study area are described below:

- The City of Bangor is an important hub for transportation services, employment, commercial and retail activities. The city has been designated in Maine's Strategic Passenger Plan (Spring 1999) as a "Gateway Intermodal Hub" supporting air, rail, highway and marine connections. Bangor International Airport (BGR) is one of the largest transportation hubs in the State of Maine. The BGR serves scheduled international and domestic flights as well as cargo airlines. A master plan has been developed for BGR that improves the airport's functionality and attractiveness to airlines and travelers, alike. Commercial and recreational development is under study for the waterfront area of Bangor. Just north of Bangor is the City of Orono, home of the University of Maine.
- The City of Brewer is a significant employment location in eastern Maine. Industrial and post-industrial in nature, Brewer is experiencing a burst of commercial land uses as well as being a popular lodging and dining location. Surrounded by many suburban towns, Brewer is adjacent to Bangor but is separated by the Penobscot River.
- The City of Ellsworth is a growing 'suburban' destination for visitors and residents alike. With many local shops and major outlets (such as L.L. Bean and a new Home Depot), Ellsworth in itself is becoming an attraction. Additionally, Ellsworth is a popular "off-island" lodging resource, offering rooms at lower rates than those on the island.
- The Town of Trenton is a regional destination for New England travelers. The Hancock County - Bar Harbor (BHB) airport serves domestic flights from Boston and charters. Connections can be made to the free, seasonal bus service ("Island Explorer") that serves tourist attractions in Acadia National Park and the Town of Bar Harbor on Mount Desert Island.

- The Town of Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park are major tourist destinations located on Mount Desert Island. These destinations attract a majority of the tourists who travel to the region. Acadia National Park is the only national park in New England. The Town of Bar Harbor is adjacent to the Park and provides lodging and other services to tourists who visit the Park and other attractions on Mount Desert Island. Many other towns are located on Mount Desert Island and also border the Park.

While the automobile is the primary mode of access some transit service is available to and within the study area. Within Bangor and serving BGR, “The Bus” provides local transit service. Additionally, Concord Trailways provides intercity service, including service from Boston, MA to Bangor. In Bangor, transfers are available to Concord Trailways Airport Shuttle to Bar Harbor during the summer. Vermont Transit offers one bus per day from Boston direct to Bar Harbor during the summer and early fall. The free seasonal Island Explorer bus service serves destinations throughout Mount Desert Island, enabling successful car-free travel to many of the Island’s attractions. Bay Ferries also serves Mount Desert Island, providing service from Nova Scotia on The Cat.

As mentioned in Section 1.2 and above, the study area is home to existing rail rights-of-way. From the BGR-area of Bangor, through and north of the Bangor waterfront and into Brewer, Guilford Transportation Industries (GTI) operates active freight service. A single freight bridge over the Penobscot River connects rail alignments in Bangor and Brewer. A portion of the Calais Branch parallels the major roadways that provide access to Mount Desert Island. North of Bangor, towards Orono, GTI also owns and operates a rail right-of-way.

The Bangor to Trenton passenger service project is one of the many projects described in *Maine’s Strategic Passenger Transportation Plan (1999)*. The focus of the strategic plan is to create an integrated, mulitmodal, passenger transportation system in Maine that supports and promotes tourism. In keeping with the recommendations of the plan, the State of Maine is considering the introduction of a network of coordinated passenger train, motorcoach and ferry services throughout the state. This system, shown in Figure 2, would allow true car-free travel to Maine’s most popular tourist destinations. A key component of the strategic plan, Amtrak service to Portland from Boston, is to become a reality this year. Extensions from Portland to Brunswick are already being studied.

Figure 2: Existing and Potential Public Transportation Services

Existing services = black type; *Potential new services = red type*

